

KEY AREA #4

TEAM BUILDING

1. *The Total Army is an immense team dedicated to the Nation's defense.* The Total Army Team is composed of successively smaller teams, ultimately down to fire teams composed of two soldiers. No mission and no command, large or small, will be successful without teamwork. Soldiering is not an individual effort.
2. Team building is complicated by the differing natures of tasks assigned to teams. An infantry squad, for example, faces very different challenges than a water purification team; but if either team cannot perform successfully, then operations will fail. Also complicating team building are constant changes in team personnel, varying levels of tactical and technical proficiency among team members, and individual personalities. This area focuses on strengthening team members' awareness that they are dependent on each other and that their words, attitudes, and actions affect others and impact the team's mission.
3. This area is most particularly related to Quality Individual Leadership, Equal Opportunity, Gender Issues, and Safety.

Historical example and case study:

FIRE SUPPORT BASE MARY ANN

At Fire Support Base (FSB) Mary Ann on the night of 27-28 March 1971, the American defenders suffered 33 dead and 76 wounded, the largest number of casualties that the United States had taken in a single action in the Vietnam War in over two years. That action is a compelling example of the devastating consequences that can occur when commanders and senior noncommissioned officers neglect team building and allow complacency to undermine effective teamwork.

FSB Mary Ann was occupied by 209 Americans from Headquarters and C Companies, 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry of the 196th Infantry Brigade, 23rd Infantry Division (Americal), a reconnaissance platoon, elements of a mortar platoon, and two 155-mm howitzer sections from the 3rd Battalion, 16th Artillery. Also located at the base were 20 South Vietnamese artillerymen. The defense of FSB Mary Ann, like most FSBs in Vietnam, relied on the close coordination of perimeter and interior defense lines. Each member of the defense team was assigned a specific responsibility that was defined by operating procedures and a defense plan, which also specified how any one element of the defense related to another. Troop leaders were responsible for insuring that each man was familiar with his task, that he was properly equipped, and that the entire scheme of defense was coordinated. The teamwork that would be essential for an effective defense of the base could only be achieved through vigilant supervision and practice.

For several months prior to the attack, the level of enemy activity in the vicinity of FSB Mary Ann had been low and contact with enemy forces had been infrequent. During the three months before the attack, American patrols had become sporadic and limited to within 5000 meters of the FSB. The apparent absence of enemy activity and the expectation by members of the 1/46th that they would soon vacate the FSB tended to lull the Americans into a false sense of security.

At approximately 0230 hours, 28 March 1971, the VC mounted a coordinated mortar and sapper attack. Almost simultaneously with the mortar attack, sappers employed satchel charges and rocket propelled grenades (RPG) to penetrate the south side of the FSB's perimeter. Americans in the perimeter bunkers hunkered down until the explosions from the mortar rounds, satchel charges, and RPGs had subsided, but by then the sappers had breached the trench line and were inside the base. Once inside FSB Mary Ann, the sappers struck over half the bunkers, targeting first the company command post and the battalion TOC, which were completely destroyed. The enemy's success resulted in a temporary disruption of external communications and the loss of nearly all officers and senior NCOs.

The surprise that the enemy obtained at FSB Mary Ann was achieved because its American defenders were neither prepared for an attack nor alert. Much of their unpreparedness stemmed from the failure of battalion and company officers to enforce FSB Mary Ann's defense plan. In addition, the battalion commander and his staff were unaware of the FSB's actual defense and alert conditions. Company officers and NCOs had neglected to assign sectors of fire to soldiers in the perimeter bunkers. Some infantrymen were not informed as to the locations of wire-detonated claymore mines, trip flares, fougasses, and other defensive measures in their defense sector. Early warning was compromised by the reduced number of troops assigned to perimeter defense and the failure of some guards to remain awake or on an alert status. The alert status in effect on the night of the attack failed to take into account reduced visibility and provisions were not made for the use of night vision aids and searchlights. Interior bunkers also were manned with fewer than the minimum number of troops required by the base defense plan and some soldiers had reported for duty without all of their equipment. Contrary to the base security plan, the bunker line was not checked each hour after 2100 hours by squad leaders, senior NCOs, or officers, and the bunker line inspector did not report to the TOC duty officer after completion of his tour. The battalion commander also failed to provide a secondary security force to operate as a roving guard in the vicinity of certain interior facilities and to post security guards at the TOC entrance.

Battalion and company officers bore immediate responsibility for the lapses that contributed to the debacle at FSB Mary Ann. Brigade and division officers had failed to inspect the base and also were unaware of its actual defensive posture. Division directives that required brigade and division inspections of FSBs and written reports of the inspections had fallen into disuse. Division-level instructions on the security of FSBs were inadequate. Also indicative of the ineffectiveness of command at FSB Mary Ann was the failure of senior officers and NCOs to prevent the desecration of enemy dead in violation of higher regulations.

The failure at FSB Mary Ann did not stem from the misjudgment of any single commander. It developed over a period of time by failures of leadership at the division, brigade, battalion, and company levels. The lessons of FSB Mary Ann, however, transcend time and place. They are a stark reminder to commanders of the importance of the teamwork that must exist for the effective application of the tactics and techniques on which base security depends and the ease with which complacency and indifference can undermine essential teamwork and compromise the safety of a force.

This area is directly supported by the following suggested lesson plans contained in this publication:

They Would Have Issued You One
Prevention of Sexual Harassment
Extremism & Extremist Organizations
Racism & Sexism
Diversity Training
Religious Accommodation
Values, Attitudes, Behavior, & Self- Awareness
Communications Process
Group Development
Conflict Management
Professional Ethics

